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### Dancing for your Self:

#### Exploring Gender Performance in Homemade Dance on YouTube

“Founded in February 2005, YouTube allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally created videos. YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original-content creators and advertisers, large and small.” (YouTube Official Website)

In the past six years, social media have expanded and developed rapidly. One of the most common video-based platforms for online social interaction is YouTube. This is a community for performance, comedy, music and vloggers that today is used by billions of people, the site allows media to spread among all its users, who share information and videos that they can upload, comment on and discuss. Production of this kind generates in a new digital culture era where viewers have become producers and create the content of this online network.

YouTube is now a cultural media platform for art of all sorts, from singing, dancing and even painting, a massive “open-mic night” for artists to show their skills and talent. As fun it is to watch one’s favorite or even one’s least favorite artist perform live or in a music video on MTV, it is at least as much fun to watch your average Joe or Jane, doing a reenactment of the same artist in their bedrooms, perhaps laughing with them or even at their expense. One of the most popular type of videos are music videos, especially homemade dance videos of people dancing in the privacy of their own homes but who are also still willing to share their “private” dances with the community of YouTube and with all who access the world wide

web. Kathrin Peters and Andrea Seier reflect on how the self is presented and created on YouTube in their article *Home Dance: Mediacy and Aesthetics of the Self on YouTube* and they discuss the importance of self-production within this new culture and reveal how it is rapidly developing: “The discussion concerning Web 2.0 often focuses on an increasing practice of self-staging and self-stylization, which in turn is considered a trademark of digital mass culture.” (188)

Dancing is an art form where performers use their bodies as a medium and combined with music and sound they express feelings and thoughts through movement; it is also a practice that for a long time in history has been signified as a stereotypical female behavior and therefore not an activity culturally suited for men. Since the beginning of pop culture, teenage girls and boys have been sitting in their bedrooms, lip synching and mimicking their idols. After the explosion of music dance videos on MTV, and influenced by Madonna and Michael Jackson, they also dance in front of the bedroom mirror, copying every move of their favorite artists. With YouTube dance video phenomena the bedroom mirror is replaced by a web camera and not only can one now watch oneself dancing to a favorite song, one can now publish it to her/his own online stage and have others watch it and also comment on it-- immediately. This means that not only a YouTube user's friends can see his/her dance moves but also the entire community of YouTube users becomes an audience, which of course is both good and bad; it is always a risk one takes when one enters the stage; there is bound to be some hecklers in the audience. But YouTubers define themselves and their role more positively; “they help to connect and inspire others across the globe” and the keyword is really “inspire.” Culture can in some ways set the standards of what is socially acceptable and with social media, ideas, behavior and interests of different kind, may spread to users across the globe, creating acceptance in communities of all sorts. By taking control over what content is available online, one may ask, are we claiming agency over the culture that

influences us? Is that sufficient to alter ideologies of stable gender roles and to break down the strong division of man and male, women and female? In my research I will apply Judith Butler's version of the term performativity on the social culture of YouTube and argue that Butler's theories on stable gender identities is starting to shift in the new world of social media and under the influence of world wide web. I will consider her theories, originally developed in 1990 to today's social media performances on YouTube, and I will demonstrate how YouTube and other forms of user based social media in some ways have a casual attitude towards gender and gender roles, it might be more accepted to go against the idea of stable gender roles than what it has been earlier and especially compared to when Judith Butler stated her theories on this subject. I want to apply her theories in media today and suggest that some of her theories are valid in the discussion of gender roles but others are no longer valid today when the user is now in control of the content in social media.

Judith Butler is a feminist theorist most active in 1990's, whose theories and beliefs have been very influential on contemporary gender theories and the relationship to culture and discourse. Butler discuss the connection between gender performativity and repetition, suggesting that gender stereotypes are reinforced over time in culture by ones constantly repeating them, as enforced by culture.. We act in alignment to gender constructions and through our actions we are reinforcing and constituting what gender we "are" based on social construction. Consequently, gender does not depend on what sex one is born with; one's gender role depends on what repetitive behavior you take on: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; [...] identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (34). In 1990 Butler wrote *Gender Trouble* wherein she outlines many of her ideas on performativity and argues that behind performing or expressing a certain gender, there is no actual or "real" identity. These theories can be applied to the discourse of pop and dance culture where gender roles have earlier been

strongly divided in what can be classified as “female” or “male” behavior. Dance for instance is something that could be classified as a feminine action, especially dancing to music performed by women or to music typically directed towards a female audience. On YouTube, the simple action by which these girls, boys, women and men press the “publish” button and display a video of them dancing in their bedrooms or living rooms may alter the view on gender roles for millions of viewers who are shifting the idea of what is “normal.” By so doing, they are also insinuating that Butler’s theories, based on a discourse model prior to the radical shifts within social media are not pertinent today. Instead, today, the publicity one gains on YouTube allows for ones “Self” to be performed. However, by expressing what Butler would refer to as one’s performed gender, YouTube dance video producers are not diminishing their identity, but instead increasing it. Gendered categories still exist on YouTube; however, they are not restrictive and seem indifferent to traditional stereotypes. ;. For example, a man dressing up as Beyonce and doing the famous “Put A Ring on It” dance, displays his identity with the importance, or non-importance, of what gender he has. He is dancing to a Beyonce song, and by this performance he is actually displaying himself more than the original artist. He is not restricted by Beyonce as a female; rather he uses it to enhance his own “self” presentation. Boys dancing to what used to be classified as female songs or artists and vice versa, changes what are identified as traditional female or male behavior. Could one claim that since so many viewers and users watch these types of videos, the large quantity makes this a repetitive behavior that could be compared to performativity as theorized by Butler? It is difficult to measure the full impact and claim that the amount is enough to alter the traditional gender role stereotypes entirely, but it does, I argue, make an impact on how we view and perform our traditional gender roles through repetition and within discourse communities.

I will combine a critique of Butler's theories to the identification of Web 2.0 practices and discuss the impact social media have on communities online, such as YouTube, where performance and display are changing, particularly according to gender. On YouTube, anyone who likes to dance and sing to Lady Gaga, for example, can now come in touch with others who appreciate their performance and perhaps give response with another similar video. By uploading a video of yourself dancing to your favorite Lady Gaga song you are displaying a big part of yourself to the world, a part of your identity, and by that confirming its existence and presence, and denying it is restricted to any one, singular category. On YouTube, gender is clearly more adaptable, and not defined by narrow, or simple cultural codes, as Butler claimed.

Little Timmy is dancing and singing in his kitchen to Bad Romance by Lady Gaga while his mother is filming it. He is giving his best and his passion for the performance is overly explicit when he is seen crawling on the floor, wailing his heart out. His mother is cheering him on, singing along to the song and shows her support in every way, this indicates that this is how Timmy behaves also when the camera is off and that this is a part of his "normal" off-line identity. Timmy then publishes this video on YouTube, without making any alterations, editing or other changes only showing his art, passion and identity. He is not "being" a singular gender, a boy; rather he is being Timmy in a unique and personal way, performing in a way that could be signified as feminine, but with him being a boy, the performance alters the idea that a feminine act, or performance, has to be directly connected to a women. The binary oppositions of female and male are now a more ambiguous and do not completely dictate one's personality. When Timmy publishes this video on YouTube, he is showing the online world that it is okay to express one's self outside traditional stereotypes. One can imagine that this could give courage to boys and girls watching this video in their bedrooms all over the world to perform their identities, to enact their cultural productions, in ways

unconcerned with stereotypes of sex or gender, Repetitions, Timmy's repetition of Lady Gaga, are not performed to regulate identity. They can be used to repeatedly change it without any of the usual cultural challenges or punishments one could normally see. Judith Butler wanted gender trouble; I give her YouTube trouble.

### **Gender Trouble**

Gender Trouble, written in 1990 by Judith Butler is one of the most influential books on feminism and presents her ideas on gender identity and performativity. In a very poststructuralist sense she discusses the differences between gender and sex, critically claiming that the view on gender is culturally constructed when sex is merely biological. She argues that they are both constructed since there is no sex without gender and vice versa. Butler talks about gender performativity; gender is mere a performance set by constant repetitive behavior through time and that our bodily acts exist on the surface and are not connected to identity:

[...] I suggest that gendered bodies are so many "styles of the flesh." These styles all never fully self-styled, for styles have a history and those histories condition and limits the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as a *corporeal style*, an "act," as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where "*performative*" suggest a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning. (Butler 190)

She also argues that there is not one identity behind the woman; instead there are many different aspects that combine within her, such as class, culture and ethnicity; there are several sides of her identity and not just one subject. It is easy to compare these ideas to how feminism evolved today, and it is also easy to agree to the idea that it is a complex mix of different elements that creates the women, but by doing so, one is still making a distinction

between women and me The discussion on what elements create gender should be applied on both men and women in order to erase the strong gender roles.

Judith Butler herself is a complicated woman, or at least in her written texts. To be able to get an understanding and to get more clarification in her texts it is essential to read other written articles about her and *Gender Trouble*, both positive and negatively angled. *Reading Judith Butler* by Sara Salih offers a clear understanding of Butler and *Gender Trouble* where Salih explains Butler's theory about the constructed gender and sex:

Butler departs from the common assumption that sex, gender and sexuality exist in relation to each other, so that if, for example, one is biologically female, one is expected to display 'feminine' traits and (in a heteronormative world, i.e. a world in which heterosexuality is deemed to be the norm) to desire men. Instead Butler claims that gender is 'unnatural', so that there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender. In that case, it will be possible to have a designated 'female' body and *not* to display traits generally considered 'feminine': in other words, one may be a 'masculine' female or a 'feminine' male. (Salih 46)

So by our own actions and performances that are female and male, one reinforces that these binary oppositions exist and that one is responsible for his/her own existence. In *Gender Trouble* Butler suggest for an alteration to stable gender roles and suggests if they exist through performance, then they could be erased through the same means. By acting differently the fundamental ideas around masculinity and femininity could be altered. Butler discusses drag as a parodic way to perform gender in the sense of altering the gender roles:

This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggest an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized essentialist gender identities. (Butler 189)

In 2011 there is still a fixation in culture, in specific dance and music, on female and male behavior. The importance is though that this behavior does not result in critiques that are adverse towards the performer. In contemporary culture, there is nothing wrong with behaving in a gendered way as long as your biological sex does not need to depend on your actions. There is a lot in media today that proves the unimportance of biological sex in terms of “performed” gender. One clear example that Butler discusses is the drag or cross-dressers who are truly performing a gender that are not the sex they are born with. If behaving in a gendered way develops and confirms the divisions we have between male and female, behaving in an extreme opposite manner would help to trouble the stable gender identities she claims we have created. Not all drag performances are subversive to gender identities, drag is often imitating stereotypic ideas of women and men; it is the actions performed unconsciously by a man or a woman that might behave in a “female” or “male” way that help alter our ideas that femininity should be connected to a woman and masculinity with a man. Certain actions that might not always be intended to copy a particular gender but merely might just be an expression of the Self are the actions that we should find to be normal, and that we are exposed to in new media. Dancing in a way that unconsciously might be signified as female or male is inevitable today since the cultural influenced gendered way is so inculcated in our daily lives. This should not decide our identities; it should merely be part of it. New media such as YouTube gives several examples of how the sex we are born with might not decide the performance we give, and what gender is signified to those actions or performance. YouTube is a capital scene for “parodic performance” and for displaying and finding examples on performing gender as a method of breaking down gender roles. On YouTube one can find several of examples of drag performances or of men dancing to a song intended for females. Although the performers do not necessarily or consciously *perform* a gender, I would suggest that they rather perform as themselves, and this might, or might not,

fall into a gendered role. , Today stable gender roles have been shaken, and through YouTube and performing dance videos, our contemporary digital culture viewers do not find it unusual to see a man dancing in a feminine way: It does not have shock-value, or appear as the parodies or subversions Butler discusses; rather it is found to be “normal” in the discourse of YouTube. Feminists in the nineties, such as Donna Haraway, for example, discussed the Internet as an opportunity for breaking down gender relations and suggested a new platform would be available to explore gender roles. They thought gender distinctions would disappear. I argue that instead representations have increased, and now public displays, as on YouTube, establish many new categories for considering how gender may be properly, or not, including in cultural discourse. .

Today, being ”online” is for many something that is taken for granted, an extension of the human and a major part of one’s everyday life. Smart phones, iPads and small laptops make the state of “being online” constant. Everywhere people go, they have the ability to check their email, or update their Facebook or Twitter status. This digital time we now live in is fairly young. Not so long ago, computers entered the homes and being online became easier and more accessible for people who were not necessarily technically trained or who worked in software development. In 2004 the term Web 2.0 was coined and a new idea of the Internet developed to a more collaborative medium where the viewing audience was allowed up on stage and more importantly, behind the scenes. A revolution in new media, where the users now get to be in control of the information online and where new community sites formed with other sectors of applications, rather than mere information. In “Gender Trouble in web 2.0” Tanja Carstensen elaborates the concept:

Web 2.0 refers to a ‘second generation’ of internet development and design, where websites enable users to do more than just retrieve information. Weblogs, wikis, podcasts and social networking sites such as YouTube, MySpace and StudiVZ

facilitate communication, information sharing, collaboration, community building and networking. (Carstensen 109)

The new medium gives users the opportunity of sharing videos, personal texts, images that express the Self online and what side of them that they wish to portray. Social networking is a given title to the medium that creates a social network and may give users a sense of belonging with like-minded participants.

There are both women and men actively using the Internet today although technology is a word that has historically been signified with masculinity and one that used to be an exclusive male activity; today it is safe to say that web 2.0 is for both female and male users. Diary writing has always been connected to girls sitting in their rooms and writing each day; that has now evolved into blogs instead and is now both a female and male activity. The technology it takes to create a site or a blog is no longer locked to men or media/software experts, but now anyone with internet and a computer can create a blog or a Facebook account. Being responsible for your online pages, profiles on your social network, blogs reflects on the individuality we live in today:

A contrasting challenge is presented by an apparent realized equality between men and women, which questions the relevance of feminism. Furthermore, the social circumstances have changed too. Individuals nowadays are expected to manage themselves, to have responsibility for their own actions and be more efficiency-orientated and economically independent than ever. (Carstensen 109)

The access to new information, voices that can now be heard through blogs and social networking in communities that allows for gender to be played around and the possibility got new creations of identities. What and who hide's behinds the computers screen is impossible to discuss, but the online Self creates online identities that may show a breakdown in gender

relations. Recent events in the world, such as political uprisings show how social media has become important in politics and social situations and the impact it may have on human relations.

Taking this in consideration it would be wrong to suggest that gender does not exist in the online world. On the contrary it is highly present on social network sites and when you create your profile on sites like Facebook you need to fill in your personal information when you sign up for a new account and amongst the basic question you have to fill in a box named “I am” with the only two options: female or male. The indelicate use of the words “I am” indicates that you are no more than the sex you have or choose to have on that site, and the self representation is immediately limited. Even if the fill-in-box were an unlimited text box available to write down an answer with unlimited characters, one may ask, are you really able to correctly and fully answer the question “who you are”? If genders roles are constructed, then your online identity, meaning the profile you develop for your social site of choice, are highly constructive and representative: “Gender, mostly in combination with heteronormativity, can be considered the most important category in the self-construction of the users’ identities.” (Carstensen 113) This shows that there is still a long way left before gender becomes unimportant in our daily lives.

YouTube does not have the function of choosing the user’s gender in the same way. One cannot see on user’s information what gender they have; the user of the community represents themselves through the videos they choose to upload. The username is self constructed and does not need to be based on gender in anyway unless he chooses. The viewer only receives information through what videos he/she see and they do not necessarily need to be of themselves. This allows for the user to provide information regardless of the sex they have, which is another example of how YouTube is one of the few mediums that functions outside of the rules of traditional gender role assignment or identification.

YouTube is one of the most common social community platforms that are part of the Web 2.0 development where the users can now take control over the content online with different media such as blog entries, Facebook pages, music on MySpace, and videos on YouTube. Most of the content on YouTube is video blogs, vlogs, favorite clips of TV-shows or performances by famous artists, but also homemade videos of peoples own performance when they sing and dance to popular music of all kinds. The most popular homemade performance videos are most likely either people who are impersonating talented people- . YouTube is a social site that is filled with videos of any kinds but in order to discuss the development of the Self through new media and illustrate how social constructions keep changing together with Web 2.0 practices, we have to narrow the focus down to a specific genre--homemade dance videos, videos with non-famous people dancing and lip-synching to popular music in their own homes. This is a quite overt depiction of the Self where the body is visible, moving to the music in a distinct way, the voice is central, as the performer is singing words that are meaningful to the performer and show a hint of the performer's personality. Also the setting is significant, their home, the kitchen or the bedroom where they spend every day in and that represents the essence of one's privacy. These aesthetics of homemade videos are common, and they are not created in an attempt to imitate professional dance videos; on the contrary, it is because they are so personal that they represent the idea of YouTube and the way it support's self made media. Peters and Seiers state in their article when they say that the "aesthetic randomness is apparently accepted easily" (191). Peters and Seiers write further about the aesthetics connected to the performers and how it shows the complete opposite of the videos from which they take their music:

But it is precisely this lack of self-consciousness that leads to considerations that not so much emphasize the amateur status of the YouTube video, but makes their very mediacy the center of attention. (191)

Reading commentaries and watching the popularity you learn that YouTube users often appreciate the gap between high paid pop stars and the common man who performs with the small means they have. It is also important to mention YouTube's function as a media and how it operates. To be able to discuss and analyze these videos it is necessary to read the commentary that anyone can leave beneath the video clip, as well as the function of video response, where you can link a video that in some way relates or which is inspired from the original. The commentary is important in developing your Self and "that is, a writing-image relation with a web of paratexts established by the functionality of YouTube" (192). These technical tools are key to support the claim that YouTube is a community that brings people together and helps to spread new popular media forms that could alter what is socially accepted, and not. Commentary is possible in real life, but not to the huge extent where it is found on YouTube, where users get the opportunity to be judged by millions of strangers: "Comments thus stand in the context of subjectification that takes place through the expression of thrill agreement or rejection" (193). The construction of the Self is important in the mere words of strangers which is a concept that is special for YouTube and for social media today. It is a direct reflection upon one's online Self. When the performers publish their videos they are suddenly exposed to the public and are directly judged by the audience as they would be on an audition or something similar, but here they do not have to leave their homes or even try hard to get cast in a role or apply for a TV-show. They take a risk in putting themselves out in the open and receive comments of both a positive and negative nature.

The variety of dance videos on YouTube also brings a variety of female and male dance videos or rather men and women dancing in their own way. There are a large number of videos of a suggestive, or sexual nature, girls dancing to attract viewers in a sexual way and who wear few clothes, But also men may be seen doing the same thing, and they are both somewhat accepted in the community although you could establish the fact that most dance

videos on YouTube are accepted in some way since the community is so large. One may ask then, is the sexual way of dancing a signification of “female” dancing or is it merely a different kind of dancing, not necessarily tied to a specific gender?

So what is the signification of female and male dancing? If we work on the supposition that YouTube represents reality, female seems to be to be dancing in a more sexual way. Entering “women dancing” in the search bar on the site results in approximately 17 000 results and the majority of the results are in some way connected to words like “exotic” “tiny underwear” or “hot girl.” Also, most of the home made videos are girls dancing in their bedrooms with lots of hip movement and the focus lies on viewing their body. This is just an example that not necessarily reflects majority of women dancing, but it still illustrates how girls dance in their homes and what they choose to upload online. If female dancing focuses on hip movement and their bodies, does that mean male dancing is generally the opposite, and what would the opposite mean? Entering “men dancing” in the search bar gives various results but almost 20 000 hits, more than what women dancing did. An interesting fact is that a lot of the results also include words as “sexy” and “exotic,” so this is not exclusive for “women dancing.” Dancing has for a long time been signified to women, taking ballet for example, and it is often females that dominated the art and male dancers were presumed to be homosexual. Petra Kupper writes in *Vanishing Your Face: Embodiment and Representation in Lesbian Dance Performance* about male and female dancing in homosexual aspects and mentions the assumptions of dancers in western culture:

Of course, male gay dancers have been associated with dance for a long while, but even this form of queer visibility has more to do with what dance means in western culture – displaying oneself, being consumed as a body by the audience – than with progressive politics and spaces for alternative desire. Women (and men who risk

being seen as effeminate unless they display their strength by lifting ballerinas through the air) are the objects of traditional dance, not desiring objects. (49)

The body stands as an important tool in this art; the body is your medium you use to express your statement. Dancing, male or female is an act of expressing your feelings, or the words of the song you perform to.

In contemporary culture male dancing is more accepted and with music videos and TV-shows as “So You Think You Can Dance” media now shows the acceptance of male dancers. Artists like Michael Jackson gave male dance a new face and dancing to his songs is not necessarily connected to any gender. On YouTube, for example, the search term “dancing to Michael Jackson” returns over 15 000 hits of both genders. Divisions within gender and dance clearly still exist: hip hop and break dance may signify male dancers when ballet and contemporary dance may signify to female dancers but the borders are not as strong as they may have been.

Then we explore into the interesting representation of “female” and “male” dancing and discuss if there is any difference when the performance not obviously shown through a famous female pop star who dances in a specific way and by that is connected to the dance and to who dances. Peters and Seiers give a clear example of this on YouTube where they analyze LilyKerrigans video of “Everyone’s a Winner,” a Hot Chocolate song from 1978. There are two videos, one “female” version and one “male” version where the user LilyKerrigan performs both of the examples:

In the female version, pink shirts hang in the background, the dancer is wearing a low-cut, black dress and pageboy haircut. In the male version, the corner of the room is bathed in blue light, the protagonist has her hair tied back and is wearing a blue T-shirt. In the first video, arms fly about, in the other legwork dominates. (195)

This stereotypic setting demonstrates how stable gender identities have divided boys and girls strongly through the years and shows that the colors of the setting, pink and blue, are included to represent female and male. The video also show that the setting and clothes are needed to emphasize the male and female video because the actual dance moves are hard to assign to “female” and “male” if it were recorded in the same settings. Through time, dance moves have changed depending on popularity in media representations, and it is hard to say that there are exact examples of what male or female dance moves would be if they were not put in settings that we are accustomed to seeing. . Peters and Seiers state, “Gender-specific dance moves and dress codes are embedded in this structure, and realized, exceeded and even shifted within it” (196). LilyKerrigans videos are gendered because of the stereotyped settings and not because of the dance movements and “the differences between the two can only really be seen in a direct comparison” (196).

Videos on YouTube set a standard for a new pop culture and with the aesthetics and looks of the homemade dance videos; the media platform creates an impact on people and users of the community. It creates a new repetitive behavior that changes our construction of gender, since gender is constructed by cultural influences and the homemade dance videos on YouTube are part of the pop culture:

The homemade remakes in front of living-room shelves and in teenagers’ bedrooms produce – whether intentionally or not – new aesthetic forms that for their part flow into a pop and media-culture archive. (199)

*The ManiaMusic* is YouTube user created by a boy named Timmy who uploaded the clip “Me singing and dancing to Bad Romance by Lady Gaga” in 2010 which so far has over 3,000,000 views. He is dancing in his kitchen, using a banana as his microphone and his own snapping with his fingers as background music while singing Bad Romance by Lady Gaga.

The video is recorded by someone you can only assume are his mother and you can hear her sometimes in the video singing along and commenting. By making this video public, Timmy really lets the viewer into his private home and then suddenly can feel closer than a family member, watching him perform in his Mickey Mouse pajamas as his father or another male relative passes by in the background, in his underwear. There is even dog showing up in the corner of the frame, and the sound of a TV murmuring can be heard throughout the video.

These qualities create an “amateur aesthetics”, according to the research of Peters and Seiers, and the setting of this clip is essential to why it has become so popular with these videos, as well as how it displays Timmy’s authentic Self more than it would have if he were doing a professional dance video with rehearsed movement, music and fictive studio made setting.

Assuming that these are his parents in front and behind the camera gives an insight into not only Timmy’s passion about performing, but also his family situation and how his parents support his singing and dancing. They are supporting this action that is signified as stereotyped feminine dancing and him copying how he sees female artists move on stage and on TV. The unimportance of Timmy’s sex and the support of his performance is what should be emphasized. The artist, Lady Gaga is often discussed in media debating her sex and whether she might be transgender or not, and she openly and actively supports the gay community. As an artist, she is denoting gender ambiguity, homosexuality or alternative sexuality of any kind. The combination of Timmy’s movement and his choice of song results in commentary where other users debate Timmy’s future sexuality and his gender. But it is not his future spouse who is of any importance to them in this video, although the mere fact that people are referring to Timmy’s future sexuality happening is interesting in regards to Butler’s theory of constructed gender and sex and how it is developed through life and through performed actions within cultural discourse. These ideas are apparently shared by a large number of YouTube users. So by Timmy’s performance by users can anticipate who he

will fall in love with in the future, Of course these open ideas are not shared by everyone commenting on the video, but fortunately it is only a small group that discusses his gender negatively, and most of them are so-called “haters”. This term is commonly used on YouTube for people who leave comments of hateful type and are often not liked by the better part of the community.

The essence you are left with after watching these videos is that Timmy is a vibrant force of nature who is unconsciously performing him Self and enjoying every second of it. Yes, his movements are influenced by what you could call “feminine” dancing but because of his young age, one can assume he does not think in a traditionally gendered way; he is publishing himself online but not performing a particular and familiar performance based on gender. He is showing that it is ok to “behave” in a female way although he is a boy and vice versa and the majority of viewers agree about this behavior, if you look at the statistics on the video. . Through the like and dislike function we can see that for those who voted for Timmy 20 988 like it and only 3702 do not. Together with the positive commentaries and appreciation he receives, it is clear Timmy’s performance is not critiqued for its diversion from tradition. This openness to new representations is what is unique and revolutionary about this media discourse community. People come together and support him in his passion and his performance, giving the thumbs up to his actions. This shows a shift in the strong stable gender roles that years ago were too stable for people to accept as a “gender troubled” behavior and demonstrate that at least within social media, people are becoming more unconcerned about whether boys wear pink clothes and have long hair or if a girl behaves in a “masculine” manner within cultural discourse.. YouTube videos, as representative of cultural attitudes, in the way films, literature and other cultural products have always been, demonstrate a shift in what may be publically performed, repeated, and circulated to others.

If drag performance is according to Judith Butler a way to break down the idea about gender roles by being subversive, then YouTube provides several examples of the parody performance of female dancing, but also non-parody examples that seem more everyday and are not intended to subvert or support stereotypes. . Some drag performance do not need to build on the idea of copying a female stereotype but are more about expressing the joy over dancing to (as) a favorite artist. The user *ladynayobi18* uploaded the video *Single ladies (put a ring on it) silver version 1* two years ago and it is a video of him dancing to Beyonce's hit song with the same name. Beyonce's music video to this song is a dance performance that has become famous and is easily recognized with the special dance moves and her black leg-revealing outfits she wears in the video. A man performing this song illustrates how gender roles are insignificant today on a platform such as YouTube. The site allows for this kind of alternative performance to exist as a form of ordinary expression, and gives an opportunity for *ladynayobi18* to publically show his performance of the song, by repeating Beyonce, not to restrict the portrayal, but to add to it and alter it. This type of drag performance years ago may have been obscured, was more secretive, and belonged only in certain private circles behind closed doors. However, now the Internet has become a new scene for this type of art and lifestyle and with plurality comes acceptance. Of the approximately 175 comments to this video, the majority of them are supportive and positive, with the exception of the already mentioned "haters," and the statistic of the "unlike" and "like" function shows that 88% of the voters like this video. Even if this is not completely reliable or pure scientific data, it still reveals that the performance is somewhat accepted and is included in the normative behavior we find on YouTube. What we also see in this video, as we did in Timmy's video, is the joy over performing and the joy of the song that reflects so clearly in the performance. Even though *ladynayobi18* is a grown man dressed in women's clothing, it is he that is the focus of the show and his performance reflects on the Self he portrays. His video, together with the

commenting and the related videos that are posted, alters gender roles in every way without it being the focus of the performance and captures the essence of YouTube's homemade videos and shows how they are a part of the new social media discourse that alters how we look upon cultural gender roles today.

### **Conclusion**

Homemade dance videos act as a stage for common people to perform a reenactment of their favorite, or even perhaps, their, least favorite artist. Their performance in the settings of their kitchen or bedroom gives the viewer an insight to their online self in combination with a little view into their lives outside of the online stage. With no further information given by the site itself, the viewer learns a little about who the performers are by viewing them since it is difficult to hide without written texts when you upload a video of yourself. Web 2.0 practices of "self-staging" and "self-stylization" can strengthen individual expression even if the individual is part of a large community as YouTube. (Peter Seiers 188) The fact that the community is so large allows the representation of Self to be strengthened, along with the comment functions and the like-button that are available for all users and viewers. The awareness of thousands of strangers viewing *your* video and giving positive comments develops the performance, and one may assume it could also give the up-loaders confidence a boost.

Judith Butler claimed in 1990 that by our actions we strengthen the stable gender roles given to us by the sex we are born with, and she suggests that if we act as the opposite gender to our sex we have, then perhaps these roles might be altered even if the performance is based on parody. She gives cross-dressers and drag as an example of troubling gender roles, but today in 2011 this idea seems narrow-minded and out of date with new cultural practices and forms of mediated representations. In media today we are more and more exposed to people

who act according to a gender not dependant on their biological sex. Drag performance are common on TV and in other mediums and with the means of web 2.0 are now more available with the user/viewer concept. In my research, I foreground how the focus on is not on the drag performance that often consciously performs a stereotype to subvert, but rather I explore the video performances given by people who perform themselves, regardless of gender stereotypes.. Gender roles are on the one hand inevitable in cultural expression as they are so deeply rooted in our daily lives gender as a form of self-representation is always present. However, YouTube demonstrates they may, in some cases, be erased from the cultural markings associated with them, One may free to use gender performance in ways that do not merely repeat stereotypes.

If the boy with the username *The ManiaMusic* on YouTube wishes to dance to Lady Gaga in what could be classified as a “feminine” action, he should be allowed to do so without the focus on his gender. Since YouTube is a user-based site, he is allowed to upload his videos as he likes and based on the comments and the “likes” of his performance he receives, he seems appreciated and the focus is on his talent rather than his sex. Timmy seems to be very passionate about his dancing, and it is unlikely that he thinks about what gender he is performing. Searching YouTube for these types of videos where men perform with femininity in their video clips shows that they are very common and that it is normal to find on this community and other communities of the same sort. By repetition this kind of media form may become more and more accepted which shows that Butler’s small scaled dreams of gender trouble has not only become a new reality, but they have done so to a much larger extent than what she intended. If web 2.0 continues to grow and stays on as an extended part of our daily lives, I am curious to see how long we may come in the future.

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